

Message Text

SECRET

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ACTION SS-25

INFO OCT-01 ADP-00 /026 W

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R 211020 Z JUN 73

FM AMEMBASSY PHNOM PENH

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1780

INFO AMEMBASSY CANBERRA

S E C R E T PHNOM PENH 6157

EXDIS

E. O. 11652 GDS

TAGS: PFOR, CB.8 7 , AS

SUBJ: AUSTRALIAN INQUIRY CONCERNING EVACUATION FROM PHNOM PENH

1. AUSTRALIAN AMBASSADOR MARSHALL JOHNSTON CALLED ON
ME JUNE 21 ON INSTRUCTIONS FROM CANBERRA TO ASCERTAIN
(A) OUR ASSESSMENT OF THE SITUATION SHOULD US COMBAT

AIR OPERATIONS CEASE AND (B) THE AVAILABILITY OF US
HELICOPTER AIRLIFT FOR THE EMERGENCY EVACUATION OF
AUSTRALIAN PERSONNEL (SOME 21 OFFICERS AND 6 DEPENDENTS)
SHOULD AUSTRALIAN- GOVERNMENT AIRCRAFT NOT BE ABLE TO USE
POCHENTONG AIRPORT.

2. I SUMMARIZED MY UNDERSTANDING OF THE SITUATION AS
FOLLOWS.

A. THE STATE OF PLAY IN CONGRESS IS STILL
INCONCLUSIVE, WITH THE EAGLETON AMENDMENT TO COME TO A
VOTE IN THE HOUSE PROBABLY ON MONDAY JUNE 25. MEANWHILE,
THE ADMINISTRATION IS CONSIDERING VARIOUS OPTIONS TO
OBTAIN LESS RESTRICTIVE CONGRESSIONAL ACTION.

B. IT WOULD APPEAR THAT COMBAT AIR WILL CONTINUE TO
BE AVAILABLE THROUGH JUNE 30. THERAFTER ITS
AVAILABILITY IS PROBLEMATICAL.

C. I DID NOT KNOW WITH PRECISION WHERE WE STAND IN
THE NEGOTIATING TRACK.

D. OBVIOUSLY, THE PSYCHOLOGICAL AND PRACTICAL EFFECTS
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OF A BAN ON USE OF COMBAT AIR WOULD BE VERY GRAVE IF THE ENEMY WERE TO CONTINUE HOSTILITIES. RE- SUPPLY OF PHNOM PENH WITH RICE AND PETROLEUM PRODUCTS MIGHT WELL PROVE IMPOSSIBLE WITH MILITARY AND CIVIL DISORDERS ACCELERATING THE COLLAPSE OF FANK DEFENSES AND CIVIL AUTHORITY.

E. IN SUM, THE SITUATION, WHILE HIGHLY UNPREDICTABLE, WAS ALSO VERY BLEAK.

3. CONCERNING A REDUCTION OF AMERICAN STAFF AND EVACUATION PLANS, I STATED THAT I WAS WITHOUT INSTRUCTIONS. SPEAKING PERSONALLY, I SAID THAT IF I WERE IN THE POSITION OF THE AUSTRALIAN AMBASSADOR, WITH NO PROGRAMS REQUIREING AN ACTIVE OFFICIAL PRESENCE, I WOULD QUIETLY MOVE NON- ESSENTIALLY PERSONNEL TO SAFE- HAVEN IN BANGKOK OR ELSEWHERE UNTIL THE POST- JUNE 30 SITUATION WAS CLARIFIED. I NOTED THAT IN AN EMERGENCY WE WOULD OF COURSE HONOR OUR UNDERTAKING TO DO WHAT WE COULD TO ASSIST IN THE EVACUATION OF AUSTRALIAN PERSONNEL LEFT IN COUNTRY. HE MUST NEVERTHELESS UNDERSTAND THAT EVACUATION IN AN EMERGENCY COULD PROVE HAZARDOUS AND THAT WE CANNOT GUARANTEE PERFORMANCE.

4. JOHNSTON SEEMED SATISFIED WITH THESE RESPONSES AND SAID THAT HE WOULD LIKE TO KNOW AT ONCE IF WE FORSEE LOSS OF COMBAT AIR SO HE COULD PLAN ACCORDINGLY.

5. COMMENT. AS THE PRECEPTION OF THE POSSIBLE WITH- DRAWAL OF US COMBAT AIR SUPPORT SINKS IN, WE CAN EXPECT FURTHER APPROACHES OF THIS SORT. I PLAN TO DEAL WITH RESPONSIBLE AND DISCREET INDIVIDUALS LIKE JOHNSTON ALONG ROUGHLY THE SAME LINES AS WITH HIM, TAKING PAINS TO AVOID CREATING A SENSE OF PANIC BUT TREATING THE SITUATION WITH CONSIDERABLE CANDOR . I SUGGESTED TO JOHNSTON THAT HIS EMBASSY FOLLOW DEVELOPMENTS COLSELY IN WASHINGTON, WHERE THE CRITICAL DECISIONS ARE NOW TO BE MADE.

6. YOU MAY WISH TO REPEAT THIS MESSAGE TO TOKYO SINCE WE UNDERSTAND JAPANESE AMBASSADOR SUGIURA HOLDS EXTREME VIEWS OF THE DANGERS OF EVEN THE SITUATION AS IT NOW

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